

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 RSR-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14

USIA-12 T-03 OMB-01 GAC-01 MBFR-03 EB-11 COME-00

SIL-01 LAB-06 /117 W

----- 092697

R 191628 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9805

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LONDON 3254

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: THE MARCH 1 BY- ELECTIONS AND THE HEATH
GOVERNMENT

REF: INR/ RESN, 3/6/73; LONDON' S 084, 1/3/73; 2051,
2/21/73; A- A617, 2/26/73

1. WE HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON THE INR NOTE
" UK: HEATH ADMINISTRATION REBUFFED IN BY- ELECTION" (REF)
AND THINK IT MAY CONVEY A SOMEWHAT MISLEADING IMPRESSION
ABOUT THE CURRENT BRITISH POLITICAL SITUATION. THIS
STEMS, WE BELIEVE, FROM AN OVER- EMPHASIS ON THE IMPORT-
ANCE OF BY- ELECTIONS IN GENERAL AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO
THE POLITICAL CALCULATIONS OF THE HEATH GOVERNMENT IN
PARTICULAR.

2. THE ESSENTIAL ARGUMENT PRESENTED IN THE INR NOTE IS
THAT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE GOVT' S BAD SHOWING IN THE
THREE MARCH 1 BY- ELECTIONS, AN EARLY GENERAL ELECTION IS
PRECLUDED AND HEATH CAN NO LONGER EVEN THREATEN SUCH
AN ELECTION IN HIS " CONFRONTATION" WITH THE TRADE UNIONS
OVER HIS COUNTER- INFLATIONARY PROGRAM. SECONDARY ARGU-
MENTS ARE 1) THAT THIRD PARTY GAINS REFLECT WIDESPREAD
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DISGRUNTLEMENT WITH BOTH MAJOR PARTIES, 2) THAT LABOR LOSSES WILL LEAD TO A REASSESSMENT OF LABOR POLICIES AND POSSIBLY EVEN TO CHANGES IN THE TOP LEADERSHIP, AND 3) THAT THE GOVT MUST REASSESS ITS POLICIES AND HEATH MUST MOVE IN " EARNEST" TO ENHANCE HIS POPULARITY WITH THE ELECTORATE. THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE ABOVE ARGUMENTS SUGGESTS A VOLATILITY IN THE PRESENT PARTY POLITICAL SITUATION WHICH WE DOUBT EXISTS.

3. RECENT EMBASSY ASSESSMENTS OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION HAVE DEALT EXTENSIVELY WITH SPECULATION ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF AN EARLY GENERAL ELECTION AND THE POLITICAL FACTORS INVOLVED (REFS). THESE ANALYSES WERE BASED ON THE BEST AVAILABLE INFORMATION HERE, INCLUDING THE VIEWS OF MANY POLITICIANS INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN FORMULATING THEIR OWN PARTIES' STRATEGY. TO REITERATE THE ARGUMENTS - TAKEN AS A WHOLE AND SEEN AGAINST THE EVOLVING POLITICAL SITUATION HERE IT HAS BEEN CLEAR FOR SOME TIME THAT NEITHER PARTY WOULD WELCOME A GENERAL ELECTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE TORIES WON' T CALL A GENERAL ELECTION UNLESS THEY HAVE TO, I. E., THEIR TERM RUNS OUT OR THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN PLUNGED INTO CHAOS, OR UNLESS THEY ARE SURE THEY CAN WIN. SNAP ELECTIONS ARE VERY UNCERTAIN THINGS. TO WIN THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION, THE TORIES WILL HAVE TO ACHIEVE TWO MAJOR GOALS, BOTH OF WHICH REQUIRE TIME: 1) MAINTAIN A SUFFICIENT GROWTH RATE TO COUNTER CHARGES THAT THEY HAVE FAILED TO SET THE ECONOMY RIGHT, 2) ENSURE THAT UK EC MEMBERSHIP BE SEEN TO BRING SOME TANGIBLE BENEFIT TO THE COUNTRY. THUS, EVEN IF THE BY- ELECTION RESULTS HAD SHOWN CONSERVATIVE GAINS, THE PARTY LEADERSHIP WOULD NOT HAVE CALLED OR SERIOUSLY THREATENED A SNAP ELECTION. FOR ITS PART THE LABOR PARTY REMAINS BADLY DIVIDED IN TERMS BOTH OF

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R 191628 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9806

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 03254

PARTY FACTIONS AND PROGRAM PRIORITIES. IT, TOO, COULD NOT WELCOME AN EARLY GENERAL ELECTION AT THIS POINT.

4. BRITISH BY- ELECTIONS ARE ALWAYS THE SUBJECT OF CLOSE ATTENTION BY POLITICAL OBSERVERS, BUT THEY ARE BY NO MEANS GOOD GUIDES TO GENERAL ELECTIONS. APART FROM THE SITUATION WHERE THE LOSS OR GAIN OF A SEAT CAN MAKE A GOVT' S MAJORITY UNCOMFORTABLE, WHICH IS DEFINITELY NOT NOW THE CASE, THEIR VALUE AS POLITICAL INDICATORS OF GENERAL ELECTION TRENDS IS CONSIDERED BY MOST EXPERIENCED OBSERVERS HERE TO BE LIMITED. THEY DO, OF COURSE, HAVE AN IMPACT, USUALLY LIMITED IN TIME, ON THE GENERAL POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE. FURTHER, WHEN BY- ELECTIONS ARE HELD IN MID- TERM THEY OFTEN REFLECT A DISSATIS? ACTION WITH ONE OR BOTH MAJOR PARTIES, A DISSATISFACTION WHICH IN MANY CASES GIVES A BOOST TO THIRD PARTY CANDIDATES. ON THE BASIS OF POST- WWII EXPERIENCE, THIS PHENOMENON HAS NOT HELPED THE THIRD PARTIES TO GAIN SEATS IN GENERAL ELECTIONS.

5. RETURNING TO THE INR NOTE, WE AGREE THAT THE MARCH 1 BY- ELECTIONS SHOWED WIDESPREAD DISGRUNTLEMENT WITH BOTH MAJOR PARTIES. THE BY- ELECTIONS HIT PARTICULARLY HARD AT THE LABOR PARTY WHICH, DURING A PERIOD WHEN THE GOVT WAS VERY UNPOPULAR, WAS UNABLE TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS
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AND SHOWED INSTEAD OF ITS OWN LACK OF COHESION AND INTERNAL DISARRAY. WHILE THIS HAS PREDICTABLY LED TO SE POST- ELECTION SOUL SEARCHING, RECRIMINATION, AND PARTY MANEUVERING, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT IT WILL RESULT IN LABOR LEADERSHIP CHANGES. KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT, THE GOVT, FOR ITS PART, DISCOUNTED THE BY- ELECTION RESULTS IN ADVANCE' SINCE THEN IT HAS CONTINUED ON ITS COURSE AND THERE IS LITTLE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IT WILL NOW FEEL OBLIGED " TO MOVE IN

EARNEST TO ENHANCE (ITS) POPULARITY WITH THE
ELECTORATE."

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